

VZCZCXRO8110  
PP RUEHAG RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHDF RUEHIK RUEHKUK RUEHLZ RUEHROV RUEHSR  
DE RUEHLB #0251/01 0621539  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 031539Z MAR 09  
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4345  
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE  
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 3532  
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 3735  
RHMFISS/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL  
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000251

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA  
ALSO FOR IO/PDAS WARLICK  
P FOR DRUSSELL AND RRANGASWAMY  
USUN FOR WOLFF/GERMAIN/SCHEDLBAUER  
NSC FOR SHAPIRO, MCDERMOTT

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [LE](#)

SUBJECT: LEBANON: ELECTIONS SNAPSHOT: BEIRUT

Summary

11. (SBU) This is the ninth in a series of snapshots we are producing for key electoral districts ("qada") in the run-up to the June 7, 2009 parliamentary elections.

12. (SBU) Beirut, with three districts and a total of 19 seats, 18 currently held by March 14 MPs, has the status of a "muhafaza" or administrative district as well as a qada. Due to a 2008 redistricting agreement at Doha, the Christian vote will have more weight than in past elections, especially in the now predominantly Christian District One. That is expected to be a battleground district between Christians affiliated with March 14 and those allied with opposition Christian leader Michel Aoun. For District Two, March 14 and the opposition parties agreed at Doha to split the district's four seats. March 14 should retain control of District Three's 10 seats.

BEIRUT: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

13. (SBU) In a review of electoral districts in 2006, the National Commission on Electoral Law (the so-called Boutros Commission) proposed that Beirut's three districts should be redrawn into more contiguous districts that better aligned confessional groups. Participants accepted the Commission's redistricting proposal at the Doha conference in 2008. Under the previous law, Beirut's Christian population was divided among the three districts and diluted, allowing the Sunni majority to determine the outcome of races for Christian seats.

14. (SBU) Under the new law, Beirut One, with five seats, on the eastern side of the city, is now dominated by Christian voters. The confessional breakdown of the 91,000 registered voters is 90% Christian, 9% Muslim. The distribution of the seats is: one Maronite, one Greek Catholic, one Greek Orthodox, one Armenian Orthodox, and one Armenian Catholic.

15. (SBU) Beirut Two in the city center is poorer and more densely populated than District One. It has four seats and approximately 99,000 registered voters, of whom 28% are Armenian Orthodox, 29% Sunni, and 25% Shia. The seats are distributed as follows: two Armenian Orthodox, one Sunni, one Shia.

16. (SBU) Beirut Three, encompassing the western areas of the city, with 10 seats and 245,000 registered voters, is

predominantly Sunni (64%), with significant Christian (18%) and Shia (14%) minorities. The 10 seats are distributed as follows: five Sunni, one Shia, one Druze, one Greek Orthodox, one Evangelical, and one other minority.

FACTORS AT PLAY  
IN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS  
-----

¶17. (SBU) In District One, analysts expect intense electoral contests between the Christian factions. Armenian voters will play a major role in determining the winners of the district's five seats. The leading Armenian party, Tashnaq, is expected to align with opposition Free Patriotic Movement leader Michel Aoun.

¶18. (SBU) In District Two, the seats would normally be strongly contested, with the Armenian Tashnaq Party playing a decisive role. However, a deal struck in Doha in May 2008 between the Future Movement, Hizballah, Amal Movement, and Tashnaq left the four seats of the district to be equally distributed between the opposition and March 14. Under the agreement, the Sunni seat and one Armenian seat will go to the March 14 coalition, and the Shia seat and second Armenian seat will go to the opposition March 8 coalition. This arrangement, however, does not exclude potential independent candidates from running.

¶19. (SBU) The Future Movement of Saad Hariri enjoys strong support in District Three, and should be able to control all 10 seats in 2009.

BEIRUT 00000251 002 OF 002

¶10. (SBU) Not surprisingly, Beirut One is the focus of attention by observers and the two blocs, since it is considered too close to call and a key test of the relative strengths of the two sides competing for the Christian vote. Among those expected to run for March 14 are Nayla Tueni, daughter of assassinated MP Gibran Teuni, and Nadim Gemayel, son of assassinated president Bashir Gemayel and nephew of current Kataeb party leader Amine Gemayel.

GRANT